



Emily Balmert

plied, “Didn’t you get something better than that last year?”

Well, actually, she did, and not just the double eagle. As a freshman, Balmert won the Ivy League individual golf championship, becoming the first Harvard woman to do so. Since then, she has been part of a changing of the guard in Ivy women’s golf, which began crowning champions in 1996. (All Ivy colleges except Cornell compete in the sport.) Yale and Princeton monopolized the league titles during the first 10 seasons. But in 2007, Columbia wrested the crown from their clutches, and last year, in the season-ending tournament at the Atlantic City Country Club, Harvard gained its first Ivy title by a robust 10 strokes and placed three golfers (Balmert, Jessica Hazlett ’08, and Claire Sheldon ’10) among the seven chosen for the all-Ivy team.

In fact, Balmert, a self-admitted “perfectionist,” has made the all-league team every year to date. As a sophomore, she set a Harvard single-season record for stroke average (77.19 per 18 holes). Though she stands only five feet, four inches tall, Balmert can hit the ball 240 yards with her driver, which she invariably uses off the tee. (“I can’t afford not to!” she says, smiling.) And her chips, pitches, bunker shots, and putts are accurate enough to have earned her the Crimson’s annual

Short Game Award, for the player who used the fewest strokes inside 50 yards, in two of her three seasons.

“Emily’s biggest strength may be her mental game,” says women’s golf coach Kevin Rhoads. “She can almost *will* things to happen. On the course, she has an extremely intense focus and doesn’t get distracted. An example was when she won the Ivies as a freshman. They played in a heavy, cold downpour for two days.” Walking over a freezing, flooded course bruised Balmert’s feet and made them swell; nonetheless, her 76-39 for 115 won the title in a tournament shortened by rain to 27 holes.

(Her personal best is a 68, carded at last year’s Ivy tourney.)

Balmert grew up and lives in the San Diego area, the only child of Mark and Chae Balmert, both of whom have played golf. In fact, her father, a retired navy admiral, remains an active player with a single-digit handicap who can keep up with

his varsity daughter. Balmert was swinging toy plastic clubs as soon as she could walk, and played her first tournament at the age of six. She liked the idea of playing against the course, and being responsible for her own scoring. “Golf isn’t a direct competition—they’re not going to kick the ball away from you,” she explains. “You just happen to compare scores.”

Intercollegiate golf compares scores in tournament play—there are no one-on-one meets—with as many as 19 teams entered. Each college enters five golfers, and sums up the four lowest scores for a team total. Last year, the Crimson won six of the nine tournaments it entered, and in the fall started even stronger, winning all four events, at Dartmouth, Princeton, Yale, and Lehigh. The Ivy tourney this spring returns to the Atlantic City Country Club in New Jersey on the last weekend in April, with the Crimson aiming to repeat as champions. Balmert’s mental toughness and steadiness will help the cause, but even a player with her enviable consistency has to admit that one of her favorite quotes on the game is “Golf is a four-letter word.”

—CRAIG LAMBERT



Visit [harvardmag.com/extras](http://harvardmag.com/extras) to see a video analysis of Emily Balmert’s golf swing.

## Chasing Bogeys

Few golf books have emerged from the unlikely golfing haven of Duluth, Minnesota; in fact, *A Beautiful Friendship: The Joy of Chasing Bogey Golf* (Calyx Press Duluth, [www.chasingbogey.net](http://www.chasingbogey.net)), by Phil Fitzpatrick ’67, may be the first. Fitzpatrick, an educator who began golfing “seriously” only in 2001, calls Duluth’s Lester Park Golf Course home. The book refreshingly mixes a commitment to golf mastery with a generous dose of whimsy; allusions range from Zen to the Rolling Stones, from Phil Mickelson to Bob Dylan.

The author (whose two favorite golf books are the Bible and the *Tao Te Ching*) suggests exercises like putting blindfolded, and titles one chapter, intriguingly enough, “The Most Important Split Second in Golf.” To Fitzpatrick, “bogey” means not only one over par, but Humphrey Bogart—gaining, with the capital B, overtones of “muscle and swagger.” The title echoes the final scene of *Casablanca*, and Fitzpatrick’s radically amateur approach suggests that most of us will do well to emulate Claude Rains and forge “a beautiful friendship” with the underappreciated bogey.



Golf bags, 1954 Masters Tournament

Photograph by Jim Harrison

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